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SOURCE Socijalna Politika, Vol I, No 3, 1951.CONSTRUCTION MANPOWER PROBLEMS IN CROATIA

Mile Piscevic

Existing personnel have not been able to meet the needs of the tremendous increase in construction activities in Croatia as compared with those in Yugoslavia formerly. The need for hiring new workers from farms has become increasingly greater. During 1950 and earlier, there was considerable hiring of new construction workers. Excluding construction projects, such as the Lupoglav-Stalijske Railroad, the "Autoput" highway, and several other projects, where manpower was obtained through People's Front and youth organizations, the following number of new construction workers were hired in 1950:

Mo	No of Workers	Mo	No of Workers
Jan	8,100	Jul	2,121
Feb	1,010	Aug	4,202
Mar	1,274	Sep	6,973
Apr	3,902	Oct	8,308
May	1,212	Nov	3,067
Jun	879	Dec	1,620

This is a total of 41,670 workers or a monthly average of 3,472.

Since the new workers came from farms and were therefore inexperienced in construction work, their productiveness was far below that of an experienced worker. Data collected by large construction enterprises with a considerable number of new workers, such as the "Tehnika," "Viaduct," "Hidroelectra," "Visokogradnja," "Novogradnja," "Tempo," "I. Lavcevic," "Primorje," and other enterprises, shows that the productiveness of new workers was 40 percent of prescribed construction quotas.

In December 1950, at the construction site of the Sisak Ironworks, new workers were fulfilling quotas as follows:

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<u>Type of Work</u>	<u>Percent of Pre-scribed Quota</u>
Excavation in Zganec, Prstac, Berak, and Novoselac	30.5
Excavation in Glivojevic Zivan	45.4
Internal transportation (transport of construction materials on the site) in Zganec, Prstac, Berak, and Novoselac	36.3
Construction and maintenance of industrial railroad at Berak and Novoselac	46.9
Construction and maintenance of industrial railroad at Maric Stjepan	40.2
Construction and maintenance of industrial railroad at Glivojevic Zivan	38.5

Work brigades employed by the "Tempo" Enterprise fulfilled quotas as follows:

<u>Name of Brigade</u>	<u>No of Workers</u>	<u>Percent of Quota Fulfilled</u>
Gajski	16	19
Stancevic	10	26
Baricevic	17	26
Belusic	13	46
Blazek	10	51
Dolenc	14	55

Similar conditions prevailed more or less at other construction sites. However, there were some exceptions where new workers fulfilled and even exceeded prescribed quotas.

The relation between the number of workers on the payroll and the number actually on the job was unsatisfactory. Data for enterprises under the Ministry of Construction of Croatia shows the following:

<u>Mo</u>	<u>No of Hr Worked</u>	<u>Mo</u>	<u>No of Hr Worked</u>
Jan	131	Jul	137
Feb	120	Aug	136
Mar	129	Sep	131
Apr	129	Oct	130
May	139	Nov	121
Jun	135	Dec	112

This is a monthly average of 129 hours per worker. Absenteeism, mostly unauthorized, was 38 percent of normal work time, instead of an authorized 6.1 percent. In 1950, the monthly average per worker was 138 work-hours, with an absentee rate of 36.5 percent.

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Personnel turnover also contributed to a considerable loss in work-hours. Data from the General Directorate for Construction in Croatia shows that the turnover in its enterprises in 1949 was as follows:

<u>Mo</u>	<u>Increase in No Of Personnel</u>	<u>Decrease in No Of Personnel</u>	<u>Mo</u>	<u>Increase in No of Personnel</u>	<u>Decrease in No of Personnel</u>
Jan	3,639	2,314	Jul	6,151	5,942
Feb	4,656	3,424	Aug	6,349	5,906
Mar	4,802	2,752	Sep	4,903	7,328
Apr	6,333	3,129	Oct	7,216	6,939
May	8,192	7,580	Nov	6,356	8,176
Jun	7,308	6,523	Dec	3,734	7,231

The fact that construction workers, because of the nature of their work, must live and work under conditions quite different from those of workers in a stable industry, and the above-mentioned difficulties led the Work Inspection Bureau of Croatia to establish a special board to supervise construction enterprises, protect workers, and solve wage problems. Inspections of all large construction sites were made several times every year. The following facts were discovered:

Low productivity made it necessary to employ $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as many workers as would be needed normally, and entailed a considerable drain on guaranteed supplies, for although productivity of workers was only 40 percent, they received full allowances of supplies. Consequently, in 1950, in construction enterprises (except for the Lupoglavlje-Starije Railroad and some other construction projects) excessive and unjustified consumption of guaranteed supplies amounted to approximately 500,000 kilograms of bread, 90,000 of meat, 36,000 of fats, 36,000 of sugar and 100,000 of corn flour.

Consumption of coffee and soap was also excessive. The drain on guaranteed supplies was even more unjustified when workers were permitted to draw supplies even during periods of unauthorized absence from work.

Low productivity of new workers was the result of various subjective rather than objective reasons. The only objective reason was that new workers came from farms, lacking the experience and necessary skill to do construction work. All other reasons were subjective:

1. New workers from farms were hired in complete disregard of their economic position, rich farmers as well as poor being hired. Manpower needs were satisfied in quantity but not in quality. Such a policy included hiring rich owners of farms, who were not interested in wages they would receive, as well as those completely dependent on their wages.

2. The technical management of enterprises was poorly organized. A large number of workers were assigned to a particular job where there was no actual need for such a number; and more workers were assigned than there were tools available. Such was the case at the "V.K." [Vicko Krstulovic] Shipyard? construction site in Split in October 1950, where so many workers were assigned that they interfered with one another, so shifts had to be organized; while one shift was working, the other was resting. Consequently, in loading and unloading excavated earth and rocks into cars having capacities of 0.75 cubic meter and transporting them 100 meters, the work norm was only 1.6 cubic meters instead of the prescribed 5.46 cubic meters.

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In more skilled work, such as bricklaying, carpentry, etc., where brigades included highly qualified workers, some type of improvised work organization resulted. Special brigades were formed, the highly skilled and auxiliary workers (concrete carriers, scaffold builders, etc.) being put in separate brigades. Because of the poor efficiency and low productivity of these auxiliary workers, their brigades were assigned more workers than prescribed, resulting in situations such as that at the "Tehnika" Enterprise on the construction site of the Sisak Ironworks, where an auxiliary brigade of 13 instead of seven helpers was formed to serve a masons' brigade of three. Similar cases occurred in other enterprises.

3. The insufficient, if any, political activity of trade union organizations affected productivity adversely. They did not launch propaganda campaigns emphasizing the significance of each new project or the importance of construction activities in the economic development of Yugoslavia. No propaganda of this kind was spread among new workers. What little was done, was done at mass meetings, and propaganda activity among new workers in their quarters, during rest periods, in the evening, etc., was neglected. Mass meetings were usually held on Sundays when most workers had gone home for the day.

4. Enterprises did not take the proper steps to interest workers in the possibilities of earning higher wages. The only propaganda done in this respect was to explain the "quota-hour," which could hardly be understood by the average worker. Workers should have been shown what wages they could earn for specific units of work. Such practical propaganda would incite interest among workers, especially those from southern areas such as Lika and Dalmatia, for whom wages represent the main source of income, and would contribute greatly to increased productivity. Not a single construction enterprise in Croatia used this method of propaganda. The technical management did its work bureaucratically, keeping books on the quantities of completed work and corresponding wages, but neglecting to do any propaganda work, especially necessary among new workers.

5. Insufficient care was taken in appointing brigadiers. In many cases, new workers instead of regular workers were appointed brigadiers, without any previous examination of their political reliability and organizational ability. The organizational inability of such brigadiers and their disinterest in work often resulted in deteriorated work discipline, increased personnel turnover, and low productivity.

Construction enterprises absorbed much more manpower than they actually needed, thus preventing the use of surplus manpower for other work.

Excessive absenteeism was due to the failure of enterprise managements to enforce economic sanctions for unauthorized absenteeism by curtailing guaranteed supplies.

Failure to charge unauthorized absences against annual leave, and withhold allowances for children, also contributed very much to absenteeism. Responsible authorities of social welfare agencies did not comply with prevailing regulations on allowances for children. Instead of requiring a proper certificate certifying authorized absence from the enterprise, these authorities were willing to accept any kind of note issued by a foreman, brigadier, mess manager, etc., when paying allowances for children. For instance, a worker at the Sisak Ironworks was allowed a normal allowance for children although he was absent for 3 days without an authorized excuse.

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In assigning the title of shock worker, unauthorized absences were seldom taken into account. Not a single disciplinary action was taken against violators of work contracts.

Personnel turnover was another enemy of the Yugoslav economy. High turnover was caused by the following:

1. New workers were not properly received. In some enterprises, the "Primorje" and "Tehnika," workers had to find their own quarters and messes, search for the construction site, etc., which were often spread over a vast area and sometimes even outside the town. There were cases when workers returned home because they could not find these facilities. At the "Tehnika" Enterprise, workers had to spend two days on the construction site to accomplish routine matters such as completion of registration forms, assignment to working place, and receipt of meal tickets. Since no representatives of the enterprise were sent to the railroad station to meet incoming workers, they usually spent several hours walking around a vast construction site, looking for the administration building. When this happened on a holiday, they had to provide for their own meals and quarters and wait until the following day to get settled.
2. Personnel turnover was often increased also by poor quarters. Very few enterprises had satisfactory quarters; in several places, they were intolerable, as at the Kraljevica construction site. Quarters were often constructed from green lumber, which would dry out in the summer months and remain unrepaired throughout the winter, so that quarters leaked and were hard to heat. Quarters were often not large enough to accommodate the number of workers assigned to them. Straw in mattresses was not renewed often enough and workers had to sleep on crumbled straw, which emits a great deal of dust. Even the most essential furnishings, such as tables and benches, were not supplied. None of the work sites had any facilities for drying clothes.
3. Very few enterprises complied with provisions regulating relations between employer and worker, such as the concluding of written contracts. Written contracts were often not made with temporary workers; when such workers quit their jobs of their own volition, responsible labor offices were generally not notified.
4. Low wages resulting from low productiveness also contributed to increased personnel turnover. At the "I. Lavcevic" Enterprise, some temporary workers hardly made enough to pay for the food they consumed. In August 1950, after meals were paid for, such workers received the following wages:

<u>Name of Worker</u>	<u>No of Workdays</u>	<u>Wages Paid (dinars)</u>
Komar, Ana	26	142
Babic, Pera	22	1
Babic, Marta	26	542

One worker, who had worked for 22 days, did not receive any wages in cash, and left owing 94 dinars for meals.

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